



# Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

STATE  
STATUTES  
SERIES

Current Through  
August 2005

## Establishment and Maintenance of Central Registries for Child Abuse Reports

Every State has developed procedures for maintaining records of child abuse and neglect. Most States maintain some sort of central registry, which is a centralized database of child abuse and neglect investigation records. Approximately 42 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories of American Samoa and Guam have statutorily created central registries.<sup>1</sup> Registries in other States, however, may be maintained as a matter of administrative or agency policy

<sup>1</sup> The word *approximately* is used to stress the fact that States frequently amend their laws. This information is current only through August 2005. Colorado, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Virgin Islands, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin currently do not have central registries mandated by statute.

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To find statute information for a particular State, go to [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/search/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/search/index.cfm)

To find information on all the States and territories, order a copy of the full-length PDF by calling 800.394.3366 or 703.385.7565, or download it at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/centregall.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/centregall.pdf)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau



**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
Children's Bureau/ACYF  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20024  
703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366  
Email: [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov)  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

## Purpose of Central Registries

rather than statutory mandate and are beyond the scope of this publication.<sup>2</sup>

While a majority of States have statutes authorizing the establishment of a central registry, some States (including Maine, Minnesota, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) do not have statewide, centralized registries. In those States, records may be maintained by the agencies that received the reports of suspected abuse or neglect.

Central registries and the systematic record keeping of child abuse and neglect reports serve to assist in the identification and protection of abused and neglected children. Reports contained in central registries are typically used to aid social services agencies in the investigation, treatment, and prevention of child abuse cases and to maintain statistical information for staffing and funding purposes.

In many States, central registry records are used to screen persons who will be entrusted with the care of children. Approximately 29 States and the District of Columbia allow or require a check of central registry or department records for individuals applying to be child or youth care providers.<sup>3</sup> Information is made available to employers in the childcare business, schools, or health care industry. Many States also require a check of central registry records as part of the background check for foster and adoptive parent applicants.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For information on State registries, see Chapter 4 of the April 2003 *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts: Review of State CPS Policy* by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, and Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CPS-status03/state-policy03/chapter4.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

<sup>4</sup> Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Guam, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming require central registry checks for foster parents. These States (except for Guam and Vermont) also require the checks for adoptive parents, as do Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, New Mexico, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, and South Dakota.

## Content and Maintenance

The type of information contained in central registries and department records varies from State to State but usually includes the child's name and address; the name of the mother, father, or guardian; the name of any siblings; the nature of the harm to the child; the name of the alleged perpetrator(s); and the findings of any investigations. Some States maintain all investigated reports of abuse and neglect in their central registries, while others maintain only substantiated reports. Access to information maintained in registries and department records also varies among States.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the length of time the information is held and the conditions for expunction vary from State to State.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See the Information Gateway publication *Disclosure of Confidential Child Abuse and Neglect Records*, available at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/confide.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/confide.cfm).

<sup>6</sup> See the Information Gateway publication *Review and Expunction of Central Registries and Reporting Records*, available at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/registry.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/registry.cfm).